

CUSTOMER SENSE

HOW THE 5 SENSES
INFLUENCE BUYING BEHAVIOR



ARADHNA KRISHNA

CUSTOMER SENSE

This page intentionally left blank

CUSTOMER SENSE

How the 5 Senses Influence
Buying Behavior

ARADHNA KRISHNA

palgrave
macmillan



CUSTOMER SENSE

Copyright © Aradhna Krishna, 2013.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2013 978-0-230-34173-9

All rights reserved.

First published in 2013 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®

in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world,
this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited,
registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies
and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States,
the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-34442-0

ISBN 978-1-137-34605-6 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137346056

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Krishna, Aradhna.

Customer sense : how the 5 senses influence buying behavior /
Aradhna Krishna.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-349-34442-0

1. Marketing—Psychological aspects. 2. Consumer behavior. 3. Senses
and sensation. I. Title.

HF5415.K674 2013

658.8'342—dc23

2012035568

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: April 2013

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To Papa for introducing me to sensorially lush things in
life—chocolate, crisp toast, corduroy, Himalayan air,
horse manure, and shoe polish...
and to Ma, Vidya, and Meera*

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
1 Introduction: What Is Sensory Marketing?	1
2 Vision	19
3 Audition	51
4 Smell	77
5 Taste	103
6 Touch	127
7 Conclusion	151
<i>Notes</i>	169
<i>Author's Biography</i>	175
<i>Index</i>	179

This page intentionally left blank

ILLUSTRATIONS

1.1	Microsoft Logo	7
1.2	Optical Illusions (Ponzo and Two Lines with Arrows)	13
2.1	Vision Visual 1—Popular Logos and Symbols	23
2.2	Optical Illusions (Ponzo and Hermann Grids)	27
2.3	Optical Illusions (White's and Netlogo)	28
2.4	Direct Distance Bias	30
2.5	Three Circles	31
2.6a	Snackwell's Cookie Packages	43
2.6b	Market Pantry Cookie Package	44
5.1	Chocolate Box Layout	118
7.1	Old and New Gap Logos	158

This page intentionally left blank

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I WAS WALKING BACK FROM COLUMBIA Health Services to my office in Uris Hall in 1990 when I realized that I always took one of two possible paths. I wondered why. As any curious academic would, I drew the map on a piece of paper and went down the hall asking my colleagues which of the two paths they would choose. I was intrigued when nearly all chose one path over the other. Next was the question of why? Why did they choose one of two equidistant paths from point A to point B? My research into sensory marketing and more specifically visual perception was born at that time. I later came up with the new Direct Distance bias whereby shorter direct distances between endpoints of two non-straight paths make the paths appear shorter.

Since then, over two decades I have conducted hundreds of studies on issues of sensory perception. As such, this book has taken me more than twenty years to write. The book integrates my research as well as that of others in marketing, cognitive psychology, and neuroscience with a view to how it can be applied in the real world. As such, it is full of real life examples and

borrowed heavily from courses on sensory marketing that I have developed and teach to BBAs, MBAs, and also to middle- and senior-level executives.

Given the long-time effort to put this book together, I am indebted to numerous people. First, I would like to thank Kurtis Droge-Germain who did a remarkable job in helping me with the actual writing of my material sometimes even adding new examples on his own. The book would have been delayed by at least another year without his help. Much of the research discussed in this book was conducted with colleagues (Mimi Morrin, Priya Raghubir, and Norbert Schwarz), my doctoral students (Nilufer Aydinoglu, Ryan Elder, Eda Sayin), and my post-doc (Luca Cian). I owe them many thanks for all the conversations we had that have honed my thinking over the years and made the research fun. Ryan Elder, in particular, has been a major stalwart in my efforts to grow this field. Contributors to the Sensory Marketing Conference, especially Joan Meyers-Levy, Joann Peck, and Laura Peracchio, were incredibly helpful in structuring hundreds of published papers into a graspable form.

I would also like to thank multiple research and teaching assistants I have had since 2009 who helped me pull together examples for the book—Jennifer Song, Aexa Barron, Ted Herringshaw, Stacey Shuman, Katherine Cohen, Gabriel Bilen, Freya Rajeshwar, Nisha Sheth, Eileen Jen. Ashley Clise, and Cara Herman. The Ross School of Business and the University of Michigan have supported me in my endeavors and provided me with the resources I need.

Many new ideas were discussed with my friends Norbert Schwarz, Daphna Oyserman, David Wooten, Poonam Arora, Matt Hull, and Kriszti Fehervary over

chai or wine. Andy, Harish, Arvind, Sonia, Manish, Swati, Namita, Poonam, Seema, Sunita, Yan, Marjorie, Gayatri, and Ruma energized me. Jag, Sidd, and Kamya let me talk to them about research I was excited about at that instant. Their incisive and often caustic comments made me think much harder about sensation and perception and its role in marketing.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS SENSORY MARKETING?

LIBRARIES AND ICE CREAM

In 1990 the Ross School of Business in Ann Arbor faced a miniature crisis. After the library announced that many journals and books would be available only in electronic form, the faculty rose up in protest. When asked to explain their reasoning in opposing the switch, faculty members found it difficult to express their opinions. They came up with such responses as “I like to feel the paper,” “I love the smell of libraries,” or “It’s just not the same thing!” They knew that such seemingly feeble reasons could not prevent the change to electronic media, so they tried to rephrase their sentiments in ways that would sound more logical and appropriate for professors in a business school. The responses they came up with included that the atmosphere was conducive to work and that the physical nature of the journals led them to peruse related articles in the same publication.

Similarly, the prevalence of online books and reading materials has changed the way students interact with their courses. Since many textbooks are available online for a reduced fee or even for free and since online texts are available wherever there is Internet access, it would seem that almost all students would jump at the opportunity and ditch paper books for good. However, this has not been the case. While some students try to use online materials whenever possible, a good number still order physical textbooks, course packs, and other books for their classes. When asked why, students come up with the same types of responses as the faculty at the Ross School of Business

and cite the feel of the book, the smell of the paper, or the ability to “cozy up with a book.” When they realize how absurd their reasons sound, students turn to rationalizations, claiming that text is harder to read on the computer screen or that some online texts are not amenable to note taking and bookmarking.

These stories would seem to suggest that there is something more to a book or a library than just a collection of printed pages or a collection of books. That something is hard to define, and although people are embarrassed to admit to its existence when they are affected by it, it is certainly real. Furthermore, it is not illogical; there is nothing stupid, old-fashioned, or irrational in saying that the feel of a book is worth shelling out a few dollars more for than for simply owning an online copy. This phenomenon is very relevant to products like the Kindle and the Nook, recent introductions by Amazon and Barnes & Noble that serve as electronic book readers. While they are convenient and innovative, if the previously mentioned stories are at all reflective of the views of the general public, they will have trouble entirely eclipsing paper books.

While the Ross faculty was protesting the removal of paper library materials, Curt Jones, a recent university graduate and prospective entrepreneur, was working on developing a company to manufacture his extraordinary invention. What was his new product idea? It consisted of taking modified ice cream mix and flash freezing it in liquid nitrogen (don't try this one at home). The resulting product tasted like ice cream, only it was more concentrated and shaped like small blobs or dots, rather than being smooth in texture. He called the substance Dippin' Dots. His marketing strategy was to brand Dippin' Dots

as the “Ice Cream of the Future” and to focus on selling it through stands in amusement parks, carnivals, and other venues rather than through more conventional channels of food sales such as supermarkets. The product was wildly successful. The company had over 27 million dollars in revenue in 2011, having enjoyed over 15 years of steady profits. But just what is it that makes consumers willing to pay \$2 more for Dippin’ Dots than for regular ice cream?

It isn’t about taste. Dippin’ Dots comes in the same types of flavors as normal ice cream, and its taste is remarkably similar to that of ice cream. However, the experience of eating Dippin’ Dots could not be more different from that of eating an ice cream cone. The texture of the dots completely changes the way the product is consumed; instead of people licking or biting the ice cream, the beads melt and burst in the consumer’s mouth. While the product might seem to be very similar to ice cream, just as physical and electronic books might seem to be very similar at first glance, the two are actually very different, and not for a silly or illogical reason.

What the irate Ross faculty and the ice-cream-loving little children tell us is that there can be more to a product than meets the eye. In fact, there can be more to a product than meets the ear, nose, mouth, or fingers as well. Many attributes of products are based on interactions between the senses or on senses consumers may not even be aware of. There is a science to studying these attributes, the senses that perceive them, the psychology that drives those senses, and the ways products can appeal to and make use of peoples’ senses. Based on that science, I have defined *sensory marketing* as “marketing that engages the

consumers' senses and affects their perception, judgment, and behavior."¹

SENSORY SIGNATURES IN ACTION

Many products have very recognizable attributes that appeal to one or more of the senses. As an example, try the following exercise. Close your eyes for about ten seconds and imagine the color pink. What do you think of? Now try again, except this time imagine a ribbon as well. What do you think of the second time around? Most people in the second case would think of the movement to fight breast cancer, and a fair number of people in the first case would think of that movement as well. However, this is not due to mere chance.

The pink ribbon was developed as the logo for Susan G. Komen for the Cure, which is the largest organization in the United States dedicated to fighting breast cancer. While the pink ribbon, much like the golden arches of McDonald's, is a logo, it is also more than that. The color pink alone causes many people to think about the breast cancer movement and now adorns everything from yogurt containers to subway cars in support of that movement. This indicates that the pink ribbon has transcended the realm of the logo. It has become what I have deemed a *sensory signature*. One way to think about a sensory signature is as a concept, often a brand name, that is evoked by a combination of sensations, much like the breast cancer movement is called to mind by the color pink.

Another way to think about sensory signatures is as the combination of sensations evoked by a concept, often a brand name. Consider the Microsoft Corporation, and,

more specifically, the Windows operating system. What comes to mind? Some people will picture the four-colored logo that appears when computers with Windows boot up. Other people will imagine the sound that accompanies that logo. There is no right or wrong answer as to the question of which of those two sensations is the one that is more closely or immediately associated with Microsoft; some people may even have imagined both. Interestingly enough, people with an East Asian cultural background tend to picture the logo with greater frequency than people with a Western cultural background; this is possibly due to the fact that many Asian scripts are pictorial.² Either way, both the logo and the sound are part of Microsoft's sensory signature.



Figure 1.1 Microsoft Logo.

When you think of Microsoft, do you think of the visual logo above, or do you think of a particular sound?

As with Microsoft, a sensory signature can encompass elements pertaining to many senses. This is the case with 5 Gum, a brand of chewing gum that claims to be able to “stimulate your senses.” Its brand name is built on the idea of having a sensory signature that appeals to all five senses. This contrasts with the traditional view of chewing gum mainly appealing to taste, with the other senses being limited to perhaps a brightly colored box design or